

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAJ-01

IO-13 EB-07 CPR-01 /078 W

----- 003461

R 220555Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6212

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

USLO PEKING

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SINGAPORE 4395

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, SN

SUBJECT: FURTHER REACTION TO MAO'S DEATH

REF: SINGAPORE 4308

1. BANK OF CHINA HELD SIMPLE MEMORIAL SERVICE SEPT. 18 IN WHICH EMPLOYEES OF THE FOUR PRC-SPONSORED FIRMS IN SINGAPORE OBSERVED THREE MINUTES OF SILENCE AT BEGINNING OF FUNERAL SERVICES AS CARRIED OVER PEKING RADIO. THERE WERE NO INVITATIONS TO NOR ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE SERVICE, BUT BANK OFFICIALS TOLD EMBASSY EMPLOYEE THAT ALL WHO CAME WOULD BE WELCOMED. PRESS REPORTS SAID HUNDREDS ATTENDED SERVICE, BUT MANY WERE REPORTEDLY EMPLOYEES OF PRC-SPONSORED FIRMS.

2. NUMBER OF WREATHS INCREASED THROUGHOUT WEEK UNTIL THEY WERE FOUR FEET DEEP AROUND BANK'S TWO OUTSIDE WALLS. WREATHS PROVIDED RARE OPPORTUNITY FOR DISPLAY OF POLITICAL SLOGANS AND PRO-COMMUNIST SENTIMENTS SUCH AS "OUR GREAT LEADER -- LONG LIVE
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MARXISM, LENINISM AND MAO TSE-TUNG'S THOUGHTS"

AND "THE RED SUN HAS SET -- WE PLEDGE TO FOLLOW
YOUR REVOLUTIONARY FOOTSTEPS."

3. IN VIEW OF EXTENSIVE COVERAGE GIVEN MAO'S DEATH
IN FIRST FEW DAYS AFTER ANNOUNCEMENT, FUNERAL
SERVICE IN PEKING APPEARED TO BE ALMOST ANTI-
CLIMACTIC AND WARRANTED ONLY PICTURE AND FINAL
STORY IN SUNDAY'S PAPERS. THE ONLY FUNERAL-
RELATED ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE CHINESE AND ENGLISH
PRESS ORIGINATED FROM THE PRC-SPONSORED FIRMS AND
EXPRESSED THEIR THANKS FOR WREATHS AND
EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY.

4. WREATHS WERE MORE NUMEROUS THAN THOSE AT CHOU EN-LAI'S
MEMORIAL SERVICE, BUT THERE WERE FAR FEWER FROM
SINGAPOREAN CHINESE COMPANIES AND FEWER SIGNED BY
INDIVIDUALS. MOST WERE FROM GROUPS IDENTIFIED AS
TAXI-DRIVERS, HAWKERS, ETC., WHO, AS ONE SINGAPOREAN
COMMENTED, OBTAIN SMALL LOANS RATHER EASILY FROM
THE BANK OF CHINA. TO MAKE SURE THE BANK WAS AWARE
OF THEIR PARTICIPATION AND AT THE SAME TIME
PRESERVE ANONYMITY, SOME WREATHS WERE IDENTIFIED BY
THE DONOR'S BANK ACCOUNT NUMBER. A CHINESE
JOURNALIST TOLD AN EMBASSY EMPLOYEE THAT GOS
VERBALLY NOTIFIED THE CHINESE PAPERS NOT TO
ACCEPT CONDOLENCE ADS. THIS PROVED A BOON FOR
THE FLORISTS.

5. COMMENT: THE EXHIBITION OF UNAUTHORIZED POLITICAL
SLOGANS, ESPECIALLY PRO-COMMUNIST ONES AS
APPEARED ON THE WREATHS, AND THE RE-TRANSMISSION
OF RADIO PEKING OVER THE BANK'S PUBLIC ADDRESS
SYSTEM WOULD NORMALLY HAVE TRIGGERED A NEGATIVE
RESPONSE FROM THE GOS, AND BOTH MAY HAVE BEEN OFFENSES
UNDER SINGAPORE LAW. HOWEVER, GOS APPEARED TO
OVERLOOK THESE QUESTIONABLE ACTIONS AND CONCENTRATED
ON CONTROL THESE QUESTIONABLE ACTIONS AND CONCENTRATED
ON CONTROL OF PRESS PLAY AND EDITORIAL COMMENT.
BY END OF EIGHT-DAY MOURNING PERIOD, BOTH WREATHS
AND NUMBER SIGNING CONDOLENCE BOOK SURPASSED
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THOSE FOR CHOU EN-LAI, A REVERSAL OF THE SEPT. 14
TREND REPORTED IN REFTEL. THERE WAS, HOWEVER, A
MAJOR QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE COMPOSITION
OF THE "MOURNERS" FOR EACH. THOSE FOR MAO CAME
PRIMARILY FROM ONE ECONOMIC GROUP -- THE UNSKILLED
WORKING CLASS. ONE ESTIMATE PUT PERCENTAGE OF
WREATHS FROM THIS GROUP AT 80 PERCENT. IN CHOU'S
CASE, PUBLIC REACTION CROSSED CLASS LINES AND

INCLUDED MUCH LARGER PERCENTAGE OF CHINESE
BUSINESSMEN, PROFESSIONALS AND OTHER MIDDLE CLASS
ELEMENTS. IT APPEARS THAT AMONG THESE GROUPS,
IDENTIFICATION AND SYMPATHY FOR CHOU WAS MUCH
STRONGER WHILE THOSE AT BOTTOM RUNG OF ECONOMIC/
SOCIAL LADDER WERE MORE ATTRACTED TO MAO.
GRANT

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DEATH IN OFFICE, POLITICAL LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976SINGAP04395
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760358-0447
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760932/aaaabazc.tel
Line Count: 122
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 SINGAPORE 4308
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 MAY 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <20 SEP 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FURTHER REACTION TO MAO'S DEATH
TAGS: PFOR, SN, CH, (MAO TSE-TUNG)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006